

More adult students, fewer classes available

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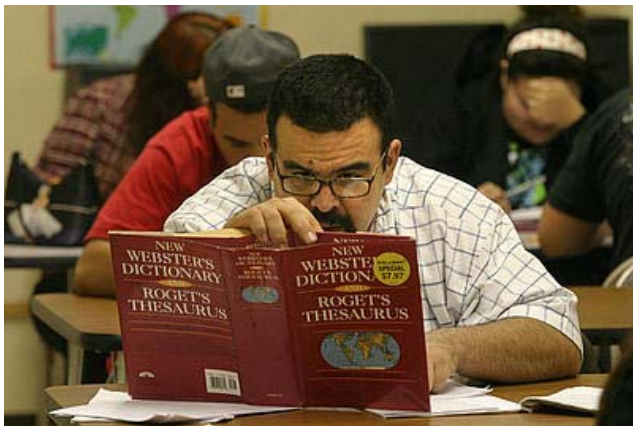
By DAYNA STRAEHLEY
The Press-Enterprise

Feeling the effects of budget cuts of 20 percent or more, Inland-area adult schools now have waiting lists for fewer seats in classes and new fees for some classes.

At the same time, more students are going back to school to get their high school diplomas or General Educational Development certificates, many saying they are doing so to help their search for jobs.

"I cannot find a job without a GED or high school diploma," said Carmen Rodriguez, 41, of Corona, a Corona-Norco Adult School student. "Everywhere I go I apply. The first thing they ask is if I have a high school diploma or GED."

Story continues below



Steven Lewis / Special to The Press-Enterprise
Corona resident Robert Guerrero works on a British literature assignment during an open study class at Corona Norco Adult School.

Rodriguez said she wants a better job than her last one as a Walgreens supervisor. She left that position a year ago. She said she finished high school in Mexico but many employers require a U.S. diploma. "It's way too ... different."

Rodriguez and her classmates said they are the lucky ones because they started going back to school before Corona-Norco Adult School created a waiting list in September.

"The influx we have right now is incredible," Director JoDee Guerard said. More students are trying to sign up for classes that are offered fewer days of the week.

In the past, when a class was full and more students wanted to sign up, Hemet Adult School was able to pay another teacher and start another section of the class, administrator Jason Ax said.

No more.

Diana Mendez, 37, of Corona, goes to Corona-Norco Adult School with her sister Desiree Kelly, 26, who realized she needed a diploma when her husband was laid off and she started looking for jobs. She and her sister signed up more than a year ago and were able to start the next day.

"Our niece signed up but she was on the eighth page" of the waiting list, Mendez said. The niece ended up going to school in Orange County.

BUDGET CUTS

Corona-Norco Adult School's budget for 2009-10 is a little more than \$1.7 million compared with \$2.25 million the previous year, Guerard said.

When the state cut school budgets by \$8 billion last year, school districts were also

given complete flexibility to sweep adult education budgets into their general funds.

Adult schools in some Inland areas, such as Corona-Norco and San Bernardino City Unified School District, saw millions rolled into the general fund from their reserve funds that had built up over the years.

In addition, state funding for adult education was reduced about 20 percent from 2007-08 levels.

Hemet Adult School did not lose any of its designated funding beyond the 20 percent cut by the state, Ax said, because Hemet Unified School District made its budget cuts elsewhere.

San Bernardino Adult School's funding was cut more than \$1 million for the current school year, the amount of the state reduction, district spokeswoman Linda Bardere said. More money that built up over years in the adult school's reserve fund was moved into the district's general fund.

Corona-Norco swept \$1.5 million from the adult school into the general fund.

Offsetting a small part of the state and local cuts, adult schools are getting some federal stimulus funds through the county's Workforce Development Agency to train workers, administrators said. The demand for enrollment is building, they said.

"A lot of it is people who've been laid off jobs," Ax said. Many students hadn't needed to prove they had diplomas in the past, but now that's required to get into a trade school, he said. "On a positive note, our enrollment is up 59 percent," Ax said.

[Story continues below](#)



HOW SCHOOLS COPE

Adult schools have responded to the fund cuts various ways.

"We have charged fees this year that we never charged before," Ax said.

Hemet adult school students now pay for their own books and a registration fee of \$10 per semester. GED classes cost \$35, including a study book and calculator. English as a second language classes are \$25, including two workbooks and an audio disk.

Hemet adult education also shortened the school year by 16 days. Evening class hours are 1:30 to 8 p.m. now, not 9 p.m., and classes meet Monday through Thursday, not on Fridays, he said.

Registration for the semester closed in October, whereas in the past, registration was ongoing and when classes were full, another teacher could be added, Ax said.

San Bernardino enrollment is down by 31 percent because of the funding cuts, district spokeswoman Linda Bardere said.

Classes aren't offered as many different times of the week, she said. Saturday morning classes and evening classes on Monday and Wednesday have been cut.

"They haven't eliminated any classes," but they are offering 50 fewer sections, Bardere said. Many courses have waiting lists.

Medical education courses have as many sections as last year. But English as a second language, another high-demand subject, has fewer sections. GED and pre-GED classes also offer fewer sections.

Guerard said the school has to evolve.

"I don't see adult education being delivered in the same way it has been for many years," she said.

Those changes for Corona-Norco include trimming rather than eliminating classes. Guerard said. Classes that used to meet four hours a week now meet for three hours and students, who have study packets, can work at home.

"We can serve more students if they're not just sitting in the classroom," Guerard said.

More independent study is another change, but it doesn't work for all students, she said.

Corona-Norco Adult School is exploring online learning for students who can communicate with teachers and submit their work online, she said.

And students who don't progress will lose their seats to someone from the waiting list, she said.

"Because of the budget cuts, we have to project how we can get the most bang for our buck."

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